Awkwardly, because he was not accustomed to this sort of thing, Jim reached out to his friend, offering comfort. But his own barriers were suddenly, horrifyingly, down, and he gave pain instead. He tried to stop the flood of memory and emotion. No. use. Deceit deceiveth and shall be deceived. Here there could only be truth.

The voice was pleasant, the words almost without inflection. The instructor stood under the skylight, a hazy figure in the late sun, and delivered sensible advice. It doesn't pay to get too close to the people under you. It's all very well to have friends, in fact you must have friends to function efficiently, but don't get too involved. Sooner or later, sooner if he's lucky because the young are more resilient, a commander has to give the order that will mean a subordinate's death. Stand fast at the Hot Gates, Lieutenant, remember the Alamo, you've just been elected a hero. If there's anything left of you, we'll give it a military funeral with all the trimmings, and a flag to your grieving-but-proud wife/husband/lover/mother. Payment in full for one life, thank you very much And if you were smart, you had never gotten to know him/her very well, and it only hurt a little....

Green and Tomlinson and Leslie and Marple and Thompson and Gary, lost beyond finding....

You did what was necessary.

I failed him.

You were not responsible for his actions. Or his weakness.

A commander is always responsible.

And there was no answer to that, either.

"McCoy to Enterprise. McCoy to Enterprise.... Yes, there's a problem. Maybe two problems. Have an emergency team standing by to beam down when you come into range. Be sure it includes M'Benga. And hurry. McCoy out." A click. "Crazy, soft-headed Vulcan...."

Responsible. Answerable. Versicle and response. Counterpoint for two minds, andante crescendo

In his private affairs, a Vulcan was answerable only to himself and the ways of logic. How, then to justify himself? The Horta, intelligent, last of her kind: Kill it quickly, Jim, and all his rationality and principles in shreds, insufficient to cover the indecency of his emotionalism.... I owe him my life a dozen times, Bones, after all, it's a matter of conscience, and Fitzgerald can go to hell if he doesn't like it, and take his orders with him.... Are thee Vulcan or are thee Human, and the scorn in the old woman's voice had driven him to knowing murder--how had T'Pring guessed?--better he had died in madness than this.... Orders, and men died, in the Neutral Zone, at the hands of barbarians, for the amusement of their captors, this one time that's not going to happen this one time I refuse to be responsible.... Jim! and even that joy denied, love denied, compassion denied as he stood stupidly with his hands behind his back while McCoy and Gem comforted the hurts the Vians had inflicted, not on Jim's body but on the inner man.... Can't let him commit patricide, rising slowly, painfully, Bones helping him to the lift all the way, easy does it, step carefully don't turn suddenly or the whole damn ship'll start to spin just a couple more steps to the command chair that's it sit down before you fall down smile come on your can do it that's right it wasn't so hard now was it? Shut up.... Holding on, stubbornly, emotionally, humanly, against the Tholians, the Gideons, the upper echelons of Starfleet Command and the government bureaucracy.... She has the mind of a child, really isn't accountable for her actions, but I'll break every bone in her body if that's what it takes.... Some things really do transcend the discipline of the Service, though I don't think this was exactly what he hand in mind....

"Well?"

"Let me get this straight. They're melded?"

"That's right."

A Feinberger whirred. "That's certainly the healing trance. I've never seen anything like this though. Look at those EEG readings, exactly the same for both of them."

"That is flatly impossible."

"See for yourself."

"Goddam. What do we do now?"